

Koki Tanaka: Turning the Lights On

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At Centre A until December 15

As we lurch toward the longest night of the year, the act of lighting up the darkness takes on greater and greater symbolic significance. Marking the winter solstice, banishing the gloom, and celebrating the return of the sun after its half-year retreat—such rituals take on many cultural forms. At Centre A, across the street from Pigeon Park in the Downtown Eastside, the darkness is pierced by a site-specific installation and video projection. Created by Japanese artist Koki Tanaka during a recent residency at the gallery, *Turning the Lights On* invests mundane objects and actions with meanings both amplified and understated.

Tanaka's work is part of *Intersection*, a temporary public-art project involving a number of institutions, groups, and individuals situated at or near the historic intersection of Hastings and Carrall. The undertaking consists of image projections in the windows and on the exterior walls of buildings in the area. At Centre A, Tanaka's large-scale video projection fills the gallery's front windows from sundown to midnight on the days the venue is open.

The video work consists of a series of images of lights being turned on in various DTES interiors: as quickly as you can say "Flick, flick, flick", one image replaces another. Some of these shots reveal the suddenly lit rooms; others record the artist's arm reaching into the frame and switching on a wonderful variety of domestic lamps one at a time. The disembodied arm echoes the disconnect between the video and the actual objects represented in it.

During the day, viewers can encounter Tanaka's related installation inside the gallery. It consists of a sprawling heap of used shipping pallets, around and upon which are set dozens and dozens of lights. Also seen in the video, they include table lamps, floor lamps, chandeliers, pot lights, spotlights, Christmas lights, and brilliant reflections from a twirling disco ball. In this setting, the pallets connote not only local commerce but also their use in temporary shelters improvised by the homeless. Tanaka employs these and other objects found in the building and the area—such as ladders, traffic barriers, benches, and boxes—to draw our attention to overlooked aspects of the everyday. He also investigates how such objects speak to the nature of place—especially the struggle between the warmth and comfort symbolized by the lights, and the poverty and discomfort of life on the street, as signified by the pallets.

Whether wandering among the glowing lamps in Tanaka's installation or standing on the sidewalk gazing at his video projection, we understand that the act of shining light into the darkness is not simply about the season. What Tanaka's work and the *Intersection* project demonstrate is the power of art to illuminate, however briefly, the enveloping gloom.

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